

THE MEASURE

A JOURNAL OF POETRY



Poems by Leonora Speyer, Earl Daniels, Harriet
Maxon Thayer, Peter Crool, Genevieve Tag-
gard, and others — — — — —

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Juggernaut

(Mengelberg Conducts the "Eroica")

. Then I rose up,
And swept the dust of planets from my eyes,
And wandered singing down that singing hour;
Pausing to pluck a mountain like a flower
That grew against the skies.

—*Leonora Speyer*

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Hysteria

THE stars blurred grey in a milk-mist sky,
The wind in the elm-tree top rode high
Save when a stooping gust of air
Skirled round me, making my candle flare.

Dumb silence in the corners hung,
And only a shadow had stirred and sung
To the dull-voiced clock in the sombre hall
Counting each second's death and fall.

In the candle-gloom I sat alone.
I cut my wrist to the clean white bone.
I bit my arm till the teeth came through.
I saw no blood. No pain I knew.

And I cried aloud in terror there
To the wind that made the candle flare,
To the blur of stars in the milk-mist sky,
And the death's-head moon that rode so high.

I cried in anguish all alone,
"Can I have died and not have known?"
And the throbbing air about me said,
"Not you, not you,—but the world is dead."

"If I May Choose My Dream"

IF when I sleep, never again to wake,
I may choose out for my eternal dream
One loveliest moment, glorious for the ache
Of perfect beauty, one from out the stream
Of thronging minutes that have filled my years
With their divinities of joy and pain,—
If when the summoner to sleep appears
I may but choose my dream, I'll not complain;
Nor shall I linger long among the proud
Cloud-shouldering peaks of life. Not these
Are stuff for dreams. I'll take, from out the crowd
Of half-submerged, half-lost experiences,
One hill-top pine with cloak of silver grain,
A slim green fragrance white with April rain.

On My Table, a Moth

OH moonwhite moth
You are like the swale of a dead candle
Mahogany mirrored.

I bruise you beneath my fingers,
I blow your satinwood dust
Soundlessly along the floor.

Rain Song

RAIN that is winged of the wind,
With a gray small voice of pain,
Oh lash the windows of my heart
Until it dream again.

—*Earl Daniels*

A Very Old Lady

PITY me not with fawning smile and gesture
And all of youth's high, careless heritage;
I who have gone the empty ways of sorrow,
Fear not the chill and windless heights of age.

Glad have I sung into the dawn's first glowing,
Gone through the lordly gates that love unbars,
Lain with still pain—and heard death's stealthy footfall—
And then been crushed in glory to the stars!

Think you with restless eyes and hurrying footsteps
To match with mine your joy, your pride, your pain—
I, who have nursed the bitter seeds of hatred,
And wept—and laughed—and plucked them out again?

Pity me not then, with your graceful leaning
Above my chair. I have no need for rest.
Why should I cry your mercy on my courage?
I have the gift of sorrows in my heart!

—*Harriet Maxon Thayer*

Narcissus---A Foreground

(MAY)

(AH, POOR NARCISSUS, NOW-A-DAYS GROWN OLD)

TO the rhythm of starred infinity,
Like a child's balloon
Swinging in time to a goblin rune,
The pollard willow
Swings a green globe over the meadow.

A cloud lifts full and potently
From the copper cauldron of the walnut tree,
Between the candles of ceremony,
Between the poplars of Lombardy—

And with feet that cling to the freshening mould
The sycamores, all clad in lace
Of a delicate, daintily tarnished gold,
Sway and pray
In a nautch as old
As Cybele—
To the rhythm of starred infinity.

And I—pour over the ideograph
The green and the white, the copper and lace
And can sense but the grace,
The fine
Shading and swirl of colour and line.
Between me and the meaning that I seek
Someone has scrawled again
A poor, bowed, wizened thing, futile and weak;
The universe blurs to a background, luring torturingly
Beyond the trumpery eikon; age in vain
Spurs desperate, far-questing, at my brain;
And hate of this, mine image—
Behold!

I still am he, condemned
Time without end
To fathom only this futility—
I, called Narcissus, now-a-days grown old!—*Peter Crool.*

Retreat

O H, be not gay,
Or you shall be of grief.
Look not upon the summer day,
Or you shall touch the autumn leaf.

But seek a room,
And close the door:
Build in your youth, a tomb,
Age and death come no more.

All of your years
Pass you outside:
No matter! You have no tears,
To mourn your pride.

Certain from grief,
Though never gay,
You are safe from autumn leaf,
And from the summer day.

—*Edwin Justus Mayer.*

Charms For Six

FOR A BEE

BUZZ, bee, and the buds will flower,
Buzz, bee, and the birds will sing,
Buzz and the great sun will shine at your voice,
Courtier of Summer!

FOR AN ELM

With your greenness and spaciousness
Rest the eyes of men;
With your long shadows
Shelter the pasturing cows,
In your branches
Hold close the nests with which the birds entrust you
And when death has come upon you
Give your body for a last service,
Robing yourself eagerly
In the tattered garment of the sun.

FOR CLOUDS

Shine, sky!
Blossom, sky!
As the earth buds into flowers,
As the sea twines its garlands of foam
As Paradise brightens with angels' wings,
Blossom, sky, with your clouds,
White and gold
Purple and rose—
Blossom, sky, into beauty.

FOR A RAINBOW

Sky, be as angry as you please,
Fill your caverns with darkness,
Lash out your lightnings,
Crash your thunders,
Send down the driven walls of the rain!—
But at the end
Whimsical and apologetic
Arch the frail glory
Of a rainbow.

FOR A LAMP

O little sun
Of all our evenings' peace
With household occupations satellited
Shine always clear
A flame cupped within crystal
Domestic and secure.

FOR SMOKE

From the nostrils of the fire
Smoke, go upward!
Where the sun is
Where the stars are,
Dance upon the chimney top,
Dance, gray dragon, high in heaven
Do not enter in the room here
Far too narrow for your sporting.

—*Elizabeth J. Coatsworth*

Hawaiian Hero

Suggested by a Hawaiian legend

Maui, the dutiful son and great hero, yields to his mother's entreaty and adjusts the centre of the universe to her domestic convenience. The days are too short for drying *tapa*. He is persuaded to slow down the speed of the spider-sun, with a lasso of sisal rope.

THE golden spider of the sky
Leaped from the crater's rim;
And all the winds of morning rose
And spread, and followed him.

The circle of the day swept out,
His vast and splendid path;
The purple sea spumed in the west
His humid evening bath.

Thrice twenty mighty legs he had,
And over earth there passed
Shadows daily whipping by,
Faster, faster, fast.

For daily did he wax more swift,
And daily did he run
The span of heaven to the sea,
A lusty, rebel sun.

Then Maui's mother came to him
With weight of household woes:
"I cannot get my *tapa* dry
Before the daylight goes.

"Mornings I rise and spread with care
My *tapa* on the grass;
Evenings I gather it again,
A damp and sodden mass."

Then Maui rose and climbed at night
The mountain. Dim and deep
Within the crater's bowl he saw
The sprawling sun asleep.

He looped his ropes, the mighty man,
He whirled his sisal cords;
They whistled like a hurricane,
And cut the air like swords.

Up sprang the spider. Maui hurled
His lasso after him.
The spider fled. Great Maui stood
Firm on the mountain rim.

The spider dipped and swerved and pulled,
But struggle as he might,
Around one-half his whirl of legs
The sisal ropes cut tight.

He broke them off, the mighty man,
He dropped them in the sea.
Where there had once been sixty legs
There now were thirty-three.

Maui counted them, and took
The pathway home; and came
Back to his mother, brooding,—strode
Like a lost man, and lame.

The tarnished spider of the sky
Limped slowly over heaven,
And with his going mourned and moaned
The missing twenty-seven.

On with a hollow voice he mourned,
Poured out his hollow woe;
Over, each day the sound of him,
Bellowing, went below.

Maui saw the gulls swarm up
And scream and settle on
The carcass of the limping thing
That once had been the sun.

But still he thought at length to see
His mother satisfied.
"Can't you put back his legs again
Now all my *tapa's* dried?"

"The days are long and dull," she said.
"I loved to see them skim."
Wearily the old sun shook
The black birds off of him.

—*Genevieve Taggard*

Medicine

WHEN spirits have been broken
It is wise
To give them medicine in common guise;
In dull words gravely spoken,
In plain tasks with a broom
That stiffly goes
Lifeless from room to room.

Everybody knows
It is a pleasant drug
For dying souls
To sit with feet warm in a rug,
Rocking
And mending holes
In someone's stocking.

Well broken spirits may forget—
Through hours and days
Of deadening ways—
They are dying yet.

—*Virginia Woods Mackall*

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ACTING EDITOR: PITTS SANBORN

Last Poems by A. E. Housman

Henry Holt & Company, New York

I HAVE been reading Housman. I have been living with Housman, with the limpid frigidity, the starry grimness of his stanzas.

Through this small year with T. S. Eliot, laboriously obsequious to obscurity, and e. e. cummings, the next recipient of the Dial prize, holding forth, he comes like the clean and eternal wind to rid our nostrils of the fumes of this esoteric offal.

And spell it any way you wish it is awful. But I am writing of Housman and not of those who unsuccessfully set strange traps to catch the muse.

I am writing of Housman and there is nothing to say.
How shall one praise perfection?

—Kenneth Slade Alling.

Waters in Rock

Granite and Alabaster, by Raymond Holden. The Macmillan Co., New York.

A POET is any number of times discoverable; so there can be nothing boastful or exclusive about saying that I discovered Raymond Holden and his sure feeling for the absolute when I read, in *Contemporary Verse* several years ago, the poem called "February 22nd" which gives startlingly that time of year preceding early Spring, telling how

The careless music of fast-melting snows
Would ripple in the gutters and be gone

on that day even if George Washington had never lived and all the bunting were torn down. This unfailing sense of reality gives him his touch of greatness; and, since his mediums are rootedly and achingly New English, he may be one of the few who are really American poets, spreading a quality which has to do with only this part of the earth.

It is a first book and so there are, inevitably, poems which would better have been left out. There are a few glaring faults: "hallways" rhymes with "always" in four poems. But some twenty-five or thirty of the best poems would make by themselves a distinctive and remarkable book. He is like Robert Frost—and kinship does not mean imitation. There is a great deal more of granite than of alabaster in his book, but, even so, there is a quarrel with the title, splendid though it is and conjuring of the pastures from which it springs; for out of it is left, except by the suggestion of omission, the texture and the urge of roots and ground, sap and soggy leaves and snow, slow-pressing juices of the earth and air, things not so hard as rock, which, brooded over by the times of day and night, are the very substance of the book. They are the things which make rock: he writes of the process and calls it the result.

One of his lyrics is "Snow":

Last night a brooding cloud
Of undecided mist
Lay on the mountain pasture
And the brooks were loud.

Now running waters lie
Faint as far bells
Under a soft white silence
And the birds ask why.

To show his best work, of longer poems made with five-stressed lines, I want to quote "Once there was silt and gravel everywhere" and "Sugaring" and "Snow Rain" and "Spring Building" and "Night Above the Tree Line" and "After the Circus" and "The Woodman" and "Epithalamium"; but their names must do. I choose "Lost Water":

It is a doubtful noon under these trees,
And I am digging in the stony sand
Among the roots of what a little since
Were blue and yellow flags and now are pods.
Deeper and deeper, and the depth is cool
And forest sounds are soft as a man's breath.
Old pines have done old apple trees to death
And stiffening silence is upon them now.
The sun and I are looking for the sweet
Quiet waters of the rocky veins of earth
In leaf and root and where mold-bitten staves
Remember lips that drank of cups now broken
And the times when buttercups were mirrored here
Where now there is a masonry of leaves.
It is a doubtful noon under the pines
That press their fingered tops to the low sky,
A doubtful noon, a doubtful world, and I . . .

—*Louise Townsend Nicholl*

Heroic Poetry---The Wrath of Achilles

JUST as Oedipus is the most tragic of all plays so The Wrath of Achilles is the most heroic of all poems. I do not mean The Iliad; I mean that portion of it that has to do with the bursting out of Achilles' anger, with his nursing of it, with the grief that his angry withdrawal brings upon him, and with his acceptance of the doom that is bound up with his revenge. Whether all this did or did not form the original Homeric poem I need not discuss here: There is a book before us; it contains so much of The Iliad, and it makes a complete history of a great human experience—"The Wrath of Achilles translated from The Iliad." The translator is George Ernle, and it is done into quantitative hexameters. It is published by the Oxford University Press.

I have said that "The Wrath of Achilles" is the most completely heroic poem as the Oedipus is the most completely tragic play. There is nothing in the Oedipus but tragedy, and there is nothing in "The

Wrath of Achilleus" but what belongs to the heroic life; there is no love-interest in it; no hope of a world beyond the grave; there is only the field of war, a fierce military pride, and the passion of pride changing into the passion of revenge. The world of the poem is not barbarous, because the poet is able to suggest that there is some divinity in Achilleus, and he is able to relate his story with the greatest splendour of music and of picture.

This swiftly-moving story is not heroic and chivalrous like "The Song of Roland," nor heroic and good-humored like our own "Tain Bo Cualnge," and the beauty that is in it is all gleaming—fire and the gleam of weapons and warriors' mail—

Up then arose Achilleus and up rose Maiden Athene
And flung about his shoulders her own victorious aegis.
Over his head that mighty Goddess set wreathing a golden
Cloud, from amidst whose brightness a flame of fire proceeded.
As when a cloud of smoke goes upwards out of an island,
Sent from a far city in distress; for an army surrounds it
And the defenders of it, though hard-press'd, beat the assaults off
Painfully from daybreak till dusk; and after the sunset,
One following the other, fires flame forth from the darkness
And redden all the Heavens for a sign to the neighbouring islands,
They should arise, gather all their ships and row to the rescue;
So to the heights of Heaven that fire blazed over Achilleus.

The scholar who translates these episodes from the Iliad makes a contribution to English metrics. The translation is in hexameters—not the monotonous hexameters of Longfellow and Clough, but hexameters that have a variety of stress. Longfellow and Clough attempted to make the natural rhythm of the verse—the rhythm it would fall into if we were speaking it naturally—identical with the scansion rhythm—the rhythm we would give to it if we attempted to put the six stresses on their proper syllables. We do not attempt to do this with blank verse, and so our blank verse when well-written is free of a deadly monotony. Mr. Ernle writes his hexameters as he would write blank verse, using the scansion-rhythm as a trellis (this is his own metaphor) which the vine of the language sometimes follows, sometimes strays from. He is successful in his versification: These colloquial hexameters of his give speed to the swiftly-moving story.

The quantitative hexameters that Mr. Ernle uses in his versification are not remote from our speech—they are certainly not remote from Irish speech. As I read lines in "The Wrath of Achilleus" I am

reminded of lines in our colloquial Abbey Theatre plays. For example, this line from Lady Gregory's "Hanrahan's Oath" is in the measure of Mr. Ernle's lines—

You did not know he was taken and charged and brought to Tuam Assizes?

And here is another line from the same comedy that has something of the same form—

They would have no proof against him. It was a dark cloudy night.

And so we who have the Irish utterance may have been speaking in quantitative hexameters all our lives without being aware of achievement.

—*Padraic Colum*

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NOTE

FRANCES C. L. ROBBINS has joined the staff of *The Measure* as Subscription Manager.

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